



Contra Costa County
Flood Control
& Water Conservation District

Homelessness and Water Pollution: Thinking Outside the Channel



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Funding by: Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Presented by Mark Boucher

Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Walnut Creek Community Meeting : March 12, 2013

INTRODUCTION: Who is the Flood Control District?

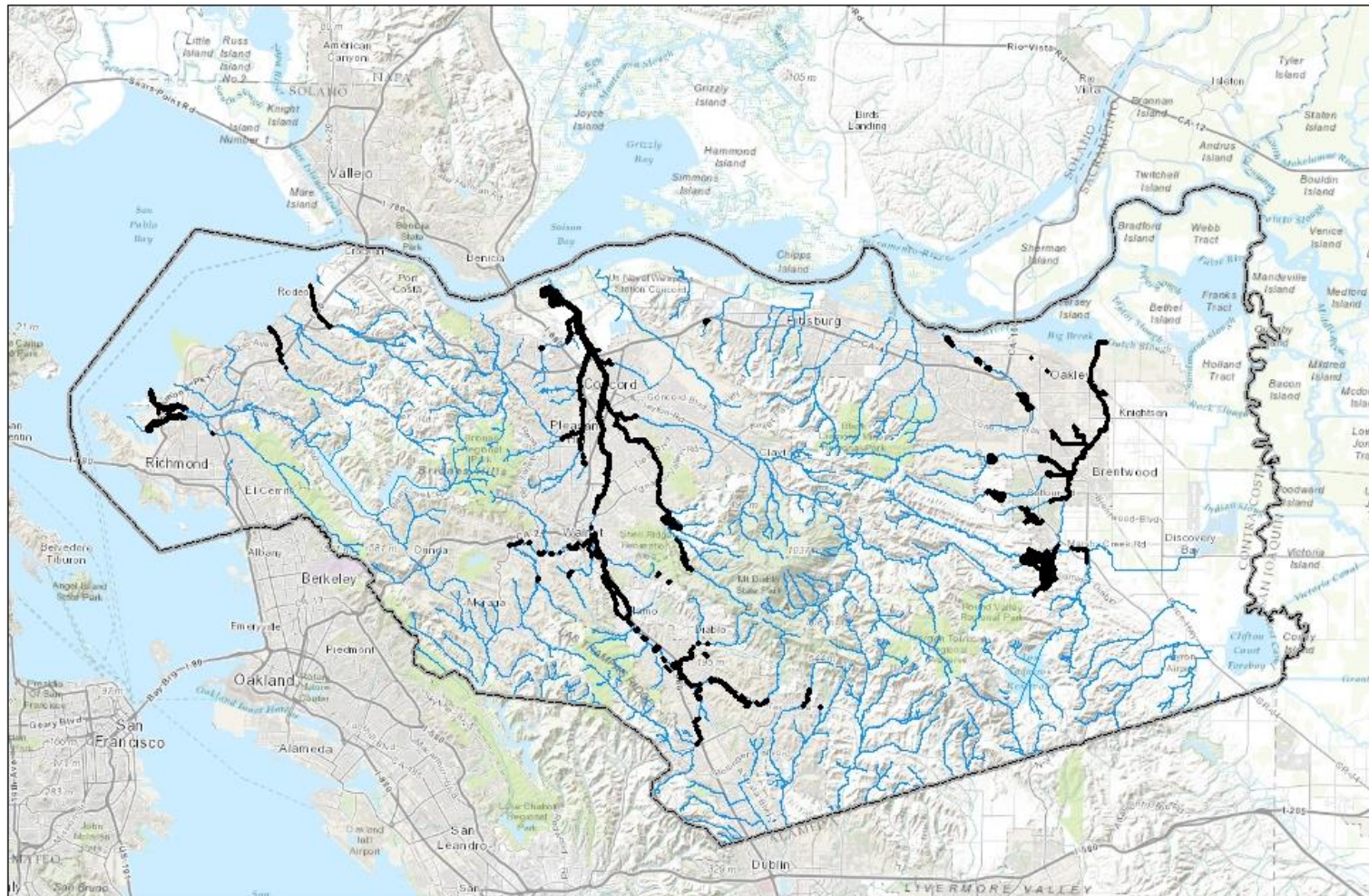
- Special District of the State
- Work within Cities
- 75 miles of channels
- 30 detention basins

Walnut Creek 1958



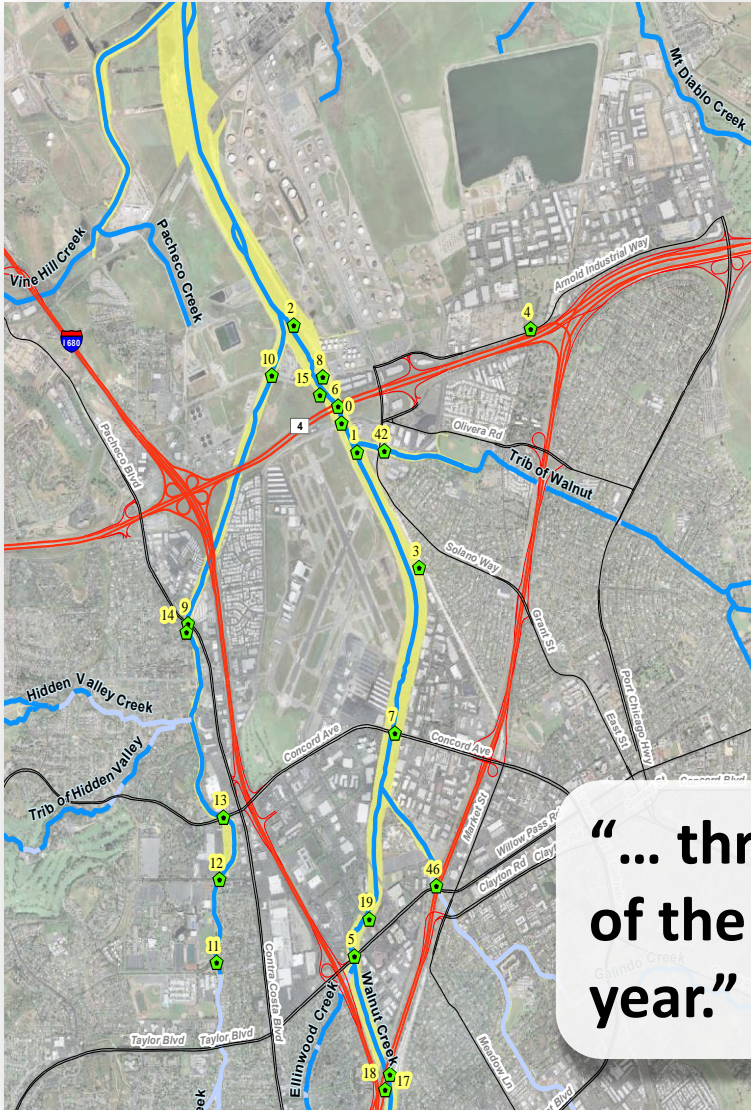
Pleasant Hill 1952

INTRODUCTION: Who is the Flood Control District?

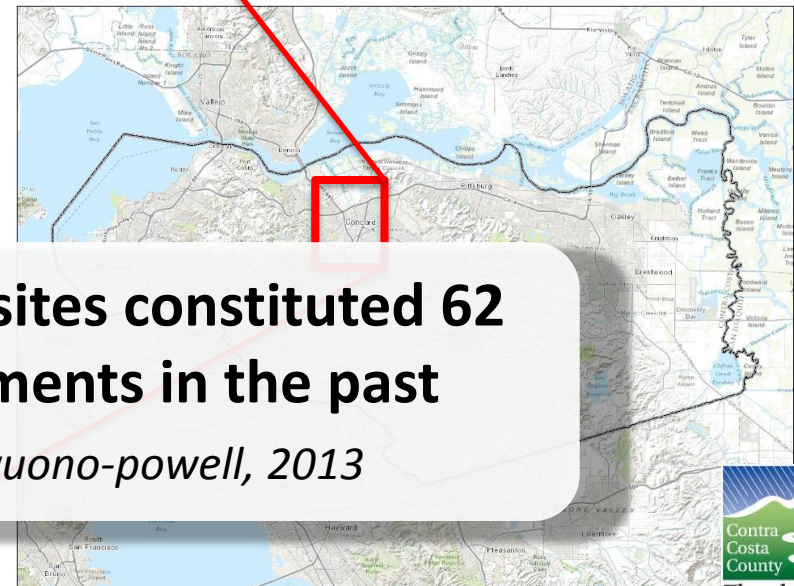


Flood Control District Property

INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem



Over the past 3 years, CCCFCD spent about \$1,000,000 clearing and cleaning encampments. Many of these camps were resettled within days of being cleared.



“... three (3) sites constituted 62 of the abatements in the past year.” - S. Devuono-powell, 2013

INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem



Encampments generate enormous amounts of trash.



INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem



Trash will enter the creek

Encampments adversely impact the water quality of our creek systems.



Solid and human waste in creeks



Dirty needles

INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem



Possible Fire Spreading

People have a concern for their own safety and that of the homeless.



Camp in the floodplain

INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem



Damage to structures



Dangerous living conditions

CURRENT STATUS

- Spending more per year on this issue
- Outside funding sources are being cut
- Population appears to be growing
- Population appears to be changing
- Causing more damage / trash / and environmental impacts
- Environmental regulations are increasing

There must be a different way to approach this problem!!!

INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem

RESEARCH QUESTION: *Restated*

What can we do to reduce pollutants from encampments and do it right;

- in a way that helps homeless people
- while making sure we work together efficiently.



INTRODUCTION: Definition of the problem

QUESTIONS POSED BY THE FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT:

- Who is living on creeks?
- What are their needs and behaviors?
- What is their relationship with the creek?
- What are the various solutions local agencies can and have attempted?
- What are the problems and benefits associated with homeless encampments?
- What issues are associated with various responses?

METHODS: Process of the Research Project

Data

Data Collection:

- Review County records
- Review outreach records
- Review protocols and policies

Embedded

Field work. Participant Observation with homeless outreach team:

- 2 days/week for 4 months
- 1 day/week for 5 months

Literature Review:

- Homelessness in the US
- Watershed management
- Interagency collaboration
- Informal settlements on waterways
- Ethnographic research

Literature

Interviews:

- Encampments Residents
- Outreach workers
- Agency actors w/in and outside of Contra Costa County

Interviews

FINDINGS: Major (Camp) Typologies

Old-timer Camps

- Under bridges, freeways.
- Near railroad tracks, creeks and channels.
- Permanent and semi-permanent structures.
- Strong social network of residents with shared values.

Newcomer Camps

- Easily accessible spaces.
- Some obvious and visible
- Temporary structures, tents and tarps.
- Social network but not highly organized.

Veteran Camps

- Removed from roads and paths.
- Least accessible.
- Elaborate order of some structures.
- Generally loners but connected to homeless network.

FINDINGS: Major (Camp) Typologies

Old-timer Camps



Newcomer Camps



Veteran Camps



FINDINGS: Impediments to Shelter

Structural

- ✗ Shortage of Shelter Beds
- ✗ Pet Ownership
- ✗ Relationships
- ✗ Legal Status
- ✗ Employment Status

Personal

- ✗ Dislike of Shelters
- ✗ Dislike of People
- ✗ Difficulty with Bureaucracy
- ✗ Mental Health

FINDINGS: Migratory Patterns



FINDINGS: Agency Response Protocols



FINDINGS: Problem

“Wicked Problem”*

- ☐ Complex cyclical problem.
- ☐ Expensive for jurisdictions involved, who have limited resources.
- ☐ Stakeholders have differing agendas.
- ☐ Many stakeholder recommendations and policies are contradictory.
- ☐ Variation in population requires multipronged approach.

*The term “**wicked problem**” was coined by Rittel who argued that, unlike some of the problems posed in science or engineering, the societal problems that planners face are inherently ill-defined and do not have clear solutions.

Rittel, Webber. 1973.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Strategies

**Themes:
Constraints**

**jurisdictional
complexity**

funding

**legal
constraints**

capacity

**lack of
consistency
across
agencies**

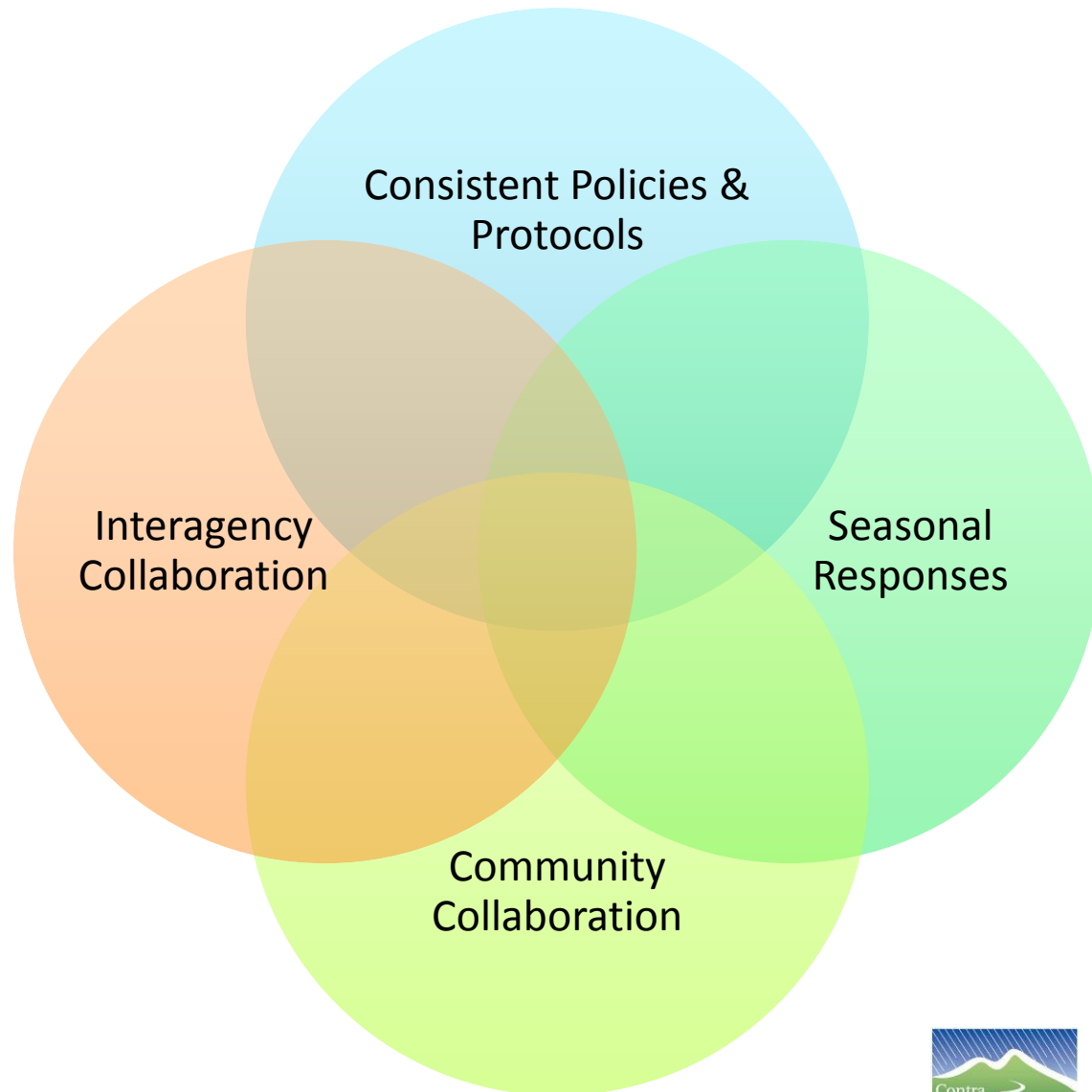
**lack of
housing and
services for
the
population**

**inadequate
mental health
or substance
abuse
services**

RECOMMENDATIONS: Strategies

Themes

- ☐ Successful Collaboration with Homeless Outreach is a key strategy.
 - **Interagency** Collaboration
 - **Community** Collaboration
- ☐ Need consistent and common **protocols** use by all agencies interacting with the population.
- ☐ Need to adjust to homeless encampment issues **seasonally**.



RECOMMENDATIONS: Analysis

Intervention	Pros	Cons	Where would this work best?	Assessment
Garbage Collection	Creates Political Pressure	Needs local support	Old-timer camps	Should be a complementary strategy
Abatements	Prevents build up of garbage	Temporary results	Bad Camps	Should be a complementary strategy
Housing Vouchers	Effective	Expensive, will not work with some camp residents	All	Should be a complementary strategy
Landscaping (strategic plant removal and planting)	Creates local investment, can be better regulated	Less national, international scrutiny	Urban or Semi-Urban Areas where community has access	Has potential
Collaboration	Creates Political Pressure	Takes time and effort	Semi-urban or rural areas where community is invested and land is not too expensive	Most promising

THE ROAD FORWARD



THE ROAD FORWARD

Policies

Hash out an MOU between agencies.

Protocols

Get everyone communicating the policy and protocols with field staff.

Plan

Work out the details of different strategies.

Practice

Use the protocols and adapt as needed.

Persistence

Continue to pursue collaborative efforts knowing it is a long haul.

THE ROAD FORWARD: Collaboration

Housing

Homeless
community/
population
representation

Homeless
advocates

Health Services
Medical Mental

Substance Abuse

Community
Residents Local
Businesses

Charitable Orgs.
Volunteers/Faith
based
organizations

Environmental
Organizations/
Volunteers

City/County
Management

City/Land Use
Planning

Engineering
roads, drainage,
maintenance

Family Counseling

Environmental
Management
trash, chemicals/water
quality, human waste

Politicians

Parks/Openspace
Agencies

Social Justice

Environmental
regulations/laws
Fish and Wildlife,
Regional Water Quality
Board

Law
civil, civil rights, criminal,
law enforcement

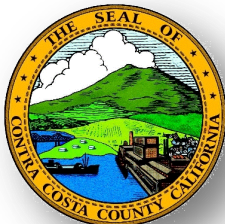
Public
Relations/Media
Management

Utilities

QUESTIONS?

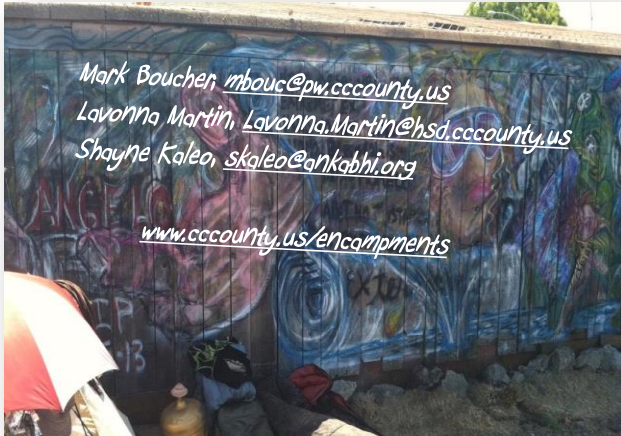
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www.cccounty.us/encampments



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QUESTIONS?

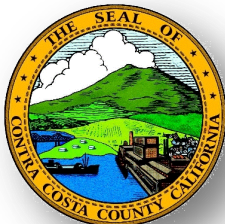


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